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## THE EARLY RELATIONS BETWEEN NEWFOUNDLAND AND THE CHANNEL ISLANDS

By H. W. LE MESSURIER, C.M.G.

In the English Channel, contiguous to the French coast, is a group of islands and rocks now known collectively as the Channel Islands, but in olden days as the Norman Isles.<sup>1</sup> The principal ones are Jersey, Guernsey, Alderney, and Sark. These islands are the only portion now remaining to England of that territory which formerly was known as the Dukedom of Normandy. The King of England is still held by the Channel Islanders to be Duke of Normandy.<sup>2</sup> The ancient history of these islands is most interesting, dating back to long before the Roman occupation of Gaul and the subsequent conquest of Albion.<sup>3</sup> The largest island of the group is reminiscent of the Roman invasion of Britain by Claudius in 43 A. D., for at that time it was named Caesarea, which has been corrupted into Jersey, and several places in the island are still known by immemorial tradition as "Le Fort de César," "La Petite Césarie," etc. Near the manor of Dieulament one sees the remains of an ancient work, in the known form of a Roman camp.<sup>4</sup>

Although an appanage of the British Crown the people of these islands retain the old Norman laws; and the officials, with the exception of the Lieutenant Governor, bear the old Norman designations, and the laws are administered as in Norman days. The inhabitants retain many of the ancient customs, and nowhere in France will you hear more antique Norman spoken than in Jersey and Guernsey. One of the ancient usages still survives. When Rollo was Duke of Normandy, in order that peace and justice might be maintained in his duchy, his subjects were given the privilege that during his life, and after his death, whenever any of them were wronged or injured in their possessions they could obtain immediate aid by crying *Ha! Ro, Ha! Ro, à l'aide, mon prince, on me fait tort*. This cry may still occasionally be heard in the Channel Islands, and heed has to be paid to it according to the ancient laws.<sup>5</sup>

In former days and up to the nineteenth century, the people of these islands were great sea rovers. Many of them were engaged in the fisheries, and some traded to the Mediterranean and in the course of time followed the adventurous Portuguese down the coast of Africa and returned laden with spoil. As early as 1246 it is recorded that ships of Jersey and Guernsey

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<sup>1</sup> Rev. Philip Falle: *An Account of the Island of Jersey*, Jersey, 1837, p. 278.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 15.

<sup>3</sup> John Patriarche Ahier: *L'Histoire de Jersey*, Jersey, 1852.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 71.

<sup>5</sup> Chron. de Normand, Chap. XXVI, Paris, 1711.

were engaged in the fisheries at Iceland, their catch being brought home and disposed of to the English and the French.<sup>6</sup>

It is an old tradition that fishing vessels belonging to Jersey, on their way to Iceland to engage in the summer fisheries, when nearing their destination were overtaken by a northeast gale which drove them southwest for some days until finally they fell in with a land whose waters teemed with codfish. They loaded their vessels there and then returned to Jersey. It was shortly after this that Cabot made his voyage of discovery in 1497, and it was always maintained by the old Jersey settlers in Newfoundland that Cabot learned from Jersey fishermen who visited Bristol of the western land that they had discovered. Be that as it may, it is a certain fact that the Channel Island fishermen were among the first, if not the first, fishermen to visit Newfoundland. It has been asserted by Jerseymen that a ship belonging to Du Moulin visited the harbor of St. John's in 1500, and at Bras D'Or and Blanc Sablon in Labrador fishing establishments belonging to Channel Islanders were in operation very early in the sixteenth century.

Rut, in the account of his voyage to the New-found-isle, relates that "on the third day of August, 1527, entered into a harbour called St. John's, and there we found eleven sail of Normands, one Breton and two Portugal barks, all a-fishing."<sup>7</sup> The Normands were no doubt the fishing people of the Norman isles, now known as the Channel Islands.

In the old Jersey records it is mentioned that in 1591 John Guillaume was fined by the Royal Court for selling in France the fish which he had brought from Newfoundland. They also inform us that by the end of the seventeenth century the Newfoundland-Jersey trade, which had brought a large amount of prosperity to Jersey, had declined, owing to the fact that Colbert, the prime minister of Louis XIV, had put a high duty on fish imported into France in foreign vessels. The trade revived, however, about 1730, and the period from that date to the French Revolution was a very prosperous one for Jersey and Newfoundland commerce. In 1731 there were seventeen vessels from Jersey engaged in Newfoundland trade; in 1732 there were twenty-four; in 1771 there were forty-five; and in 1785 there were fifty-nine vessels. Besides these Jersey vessels there were a number of Guernsey vessels engaged in the same trade.<sup>8</sup>

Harris, in his history,<sup>9</sup> notes that in May, 1591, the fishermen of Guernsey, through one Colin, applied to the municipality of St. Malo for permission to fish in Newfoundland, but were refused. This refers to that portion of the coast of Newfoundland which came under the jurisdiction of the French in 1662 by the secret arrangement made between Charles II and the French king, whereby all the southern coast of the island west of Cape St. Mary's was to be held by the French. The Guernsey and Jersey people

<sup>6</sup> Jersey Chronicles in archives of Jersey.

<sup>7</sup> Purchas His Pilgrimes, 1625.

<sup>8</sup> Falle: *op. cit.*, and Jonathan Duncan: The History of Guernsey, London, 1841.

<sup>9</sup> Henry Harris: John Cabot, the Discoverer of North America, and Sebastian, His Son. London, 1896.

had, prior to 1662, fished in Placentia and Fortune Bays, and the Villeneuves had a fishing establishment at Placentia before the French occupation. Jersey Side in Placentia Bay is the only reminder left of the fact that a fishing firm from the Channel Islands once occupied this spot.

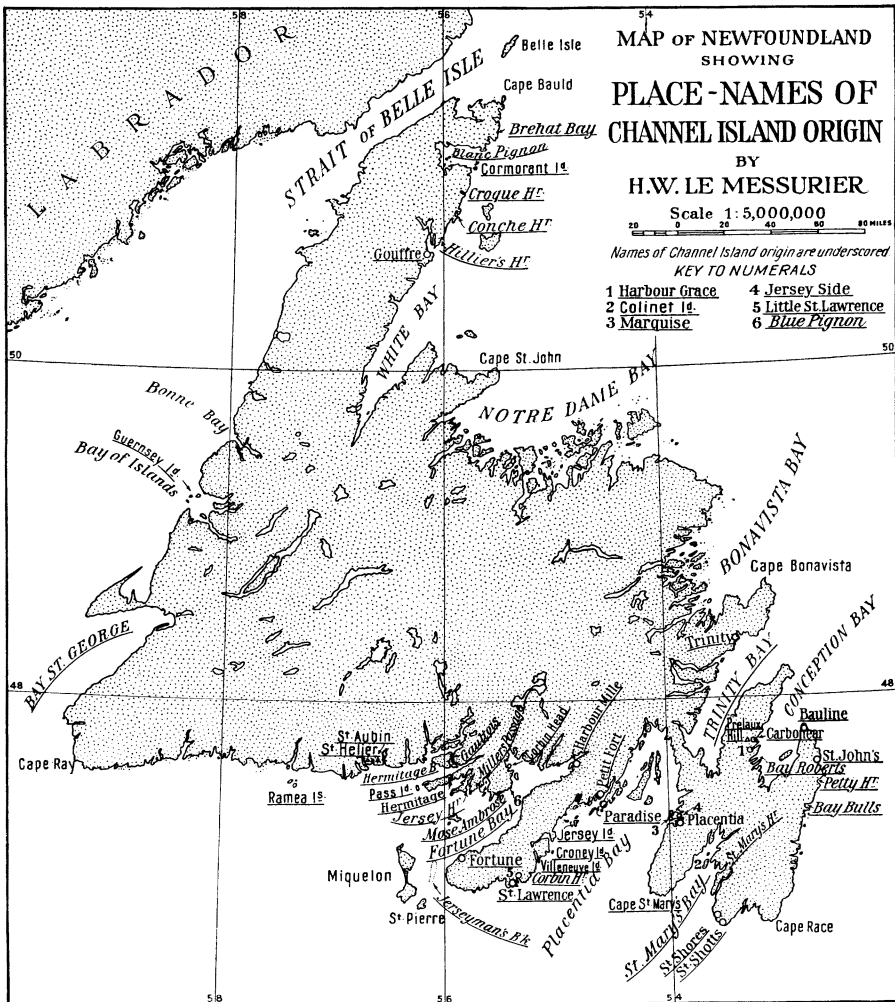


FIG. 1.

History, as it deals with the discovery of America, gives us records of certain expeditions which sailed from the Old World to search for and discover lands in the west. Each expedition was fitted out at the expense of one of the crowned heads of the maritime states of Europe, and their doings were fairly chronicled, but no account was taken of the venturesome fisherman or trader who sailed away in pursuit of the wealth of the seas and the accumulation of riches by trading with the barbarians or savages of

little known lands. Yet there is often a record left in the names of places which tells us of the people who first discovered the harbors, capes, rivers, etc., of a new country, although it may not be chronicled in history. As Canon Taylor says,<sup>10</sup> "the name of a district or of a town may speak to us of events which written history has failed to commemorate." That many of the names of places in Newfoundland were given by the people of the Channel Islands proves that it was very early known to, and occupied by, these adventurous fishermen.

It has in recent years been asserted by two writers<sup>11</sup> on Newfoundland that John Cabot discovered and named St. John's, the capital of Newfoundland, on St. John's day, 1497, the date on which he first saw the land of America. On an examination of the account of John Cabot's voyage I fail to find any authority for this assertion. It has also been contended by these writers that Cape Bonavista was the landfall of Cabot, and Judge Prowse, the author of the "History of Newfoundland," vigorously maintained that this was the case and relied very strongly on tradition.<sup>12</sup> Messrs. HARRISSE,<sup>13</sup> DAWSON,<sup>14</sup> BIGGAR,<sup>15</sup> and others, however, do not agree with Judge Prowse and argue that Cape Breton was the land first seen by Cabot. In his article on John Cabot in the *Encyclopædia Britannica*,<sup>16</sup> as well as in his "Voyages of the Cabots,"<sup>17</sup> H. P. Biggar speaks of the landfall of Cabot as some place on the American continent, and not Newfoundland. If Newfoundland was not the landfall of Cabot, he could not have discovered and named St. John's on St. John's day, 1497.

But supposing that Cape Bonavista was the landfall of Cabot, we have it on record that he made the land, with a large island lying off it. There is no large island lying off Cape Bonavista nor off St. John's. Cabot had been at sea for fifty-seven days in a caravel of fifty tons, and it is certain that when he made the land he would at once seek anchorage to obtain wood and water and proceed to clean his ship. In those days, when anti-fouling paints were unknown, vessels' bottoms had frequently to be cleaned during a long voyage. Moreover we are told that Cabot did land and that after he landed "the Royal Banner was unfurled and in solemn form Cabot took possession of the Country in the name of King Henry VII. . . . Having taken on board wood and water, preparations were made to return home as quickly as possible, and he sailed North three hundred miles."

St. John's lies eighty miles south of Cape Bonavista; if Cabot had

<sup>10</sup> Isaac Taylor, *Canon of York: Names and Places*, Rivington, London, 1864, 1865, 1873.

<sup>11</sup> The late D. W. Prowse and the late Archbishop Howley in Newfoundland newspapers and magazines.

<sup>12</sup> D. W. Prowse: *A History of Newfoundland from the English, Colonial, and Foreign Records*. London, 1895.

<sup>13</sup> Henry HARRISSE: work cited in footnote 9.

<sup>14</sup> S. E. Dawson: *The Voyages of the Cabots in 1497 and 1498*, *Trans. Royal Soc. of Canada: Section II*, Vol. 12, 1894, pp. 51-112.

<sup>15</sup> H. P. Biggar: *The Voyages of the Cabots and of the Corte-Reals to North America and Greenland*, *Revue Hispanique*, Vol. 10, 1903, pp. 485-593.

<sup>16</sup> 11th edit., 1910-11.

<sup>17</sup> See footnote 15.

landed at Cape Bonavista and sailed north he could not have made St. John's; if he had sailed south instead of north he could not have reached St. John's on St. John's day. St. John's was not named on any of the early charts; it first appears in a chart by Desliens<sup>18</sup>, 1541, and the name was first recorded by Rut. Who then gave that name to the place? And why should Rut in 1527 speak of it as though it had been known and so called for some time? I have no doubt that the name, like many names around the coast of Newfoundland, was given by some of the rovers of the Channel Islands, most likely by a Jerseyman from the parish of St. John's in Jersey.

On the northeast coast of the island of Jersey there are three places lying near each other and in the order named, viz:—St. John's Bay, Petit Port, and Bouley Bay. Can it be mere coincidence that in Newfoundland we have St. John's Bay, wherein the harbor of St. John's is situated, Petty Harbour, and Bay Bulls (formerly written Boulee Bay and so appearing on the old charts), all contiguous and following in the same order as the Jersey places? I submit that this evidence is strong enough to warrant the opinion of Channel Islanders that a Jerseyman named these three places St. John's, Petty Harbour, and Boulee Bay.

Jersey is divided into twelve parishes, viz:—St. Owen's, St. Peter's, St. Brelade's, St. Lawrence's, St. Mary's, St. John's, St. Hillier's, Trinity, St. Martin's, St. Saviour's, Grouville, and St. Clement's. Many of these names are prominent in Newfoundland, especially in the names of bays and inhabited places, such as St. Mary's, St. Mary's Bay, St. Lawrence, St. John's, St. John's Bay, Trinity, and Trinity Bay. It may be said that these names were universally used by French, Spanish, and Portuguese discoverers in naming the new places that they found, but I am strongly of opinion that surrounding circumstances and early occupation by Channel Islanders prove that the names originated with them.

On the northeast coast of Newfoundland the majority of places have French names. It is difficult to say whether the French are responsible for any of them, but many are undoubtedly Channel Island names. Brehat Bay, on the eastern shore of the long, narrow peninsula in the north, is one, and no doubt reminded a Channel Island fisherman of the place where he moored his fishing vessel during the months of winter. In the islands of Jersey and Guernsey in those days there were no safe winter harbors or mooring places, and Brehat on the Norman coast, southwest of Guernsey, was used almost exclusively by the Channel Islanders as a wintering port for their vessels. Farther along we find Conche and Croque, two ports near together. Croque is the name of a place and of a point on the northwest coast of Guernsey, and La Conchee lies just off the point. Gouffre is a name to be found both in Jersey and Guernsey, as Le Gouffre. The harbor now known as Hilliers was originally called St. Heliers, the name of

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<sup>18</sup> Nicholas Desliens of Dieppe.

the principal town in Jersey. Blanc Pignon is also of Jersey origin, as is Cormorant; as no such bird as a cormorant was ever found in Newfoundland, this island is probably named after a similar island rock lying off the coast of Jersey.

Turning now to the southeastern extremity of the island, we find in Conception Bay many places the names of which are evidently of Channel Island origin. The names Harbour Grace and Carbonear do not appear on any maps prior to 1700, and some of the old names such as Frillon and Cape L'Argent have disappeared. Carbonear is a corruption of Charbonier, which was the name given to it by the Jerseymen, as they had charcoal pits there at a very early period. A letter written by an old Jersey lady early in the eighteenth century speaks of "Charbonier," referring to Carbonear. This letter was written to a gentleman living at Harbour Grace and was in the possession of his family until quite recently. At Mosquito Cove near Carbonear there was a Jersey establishment very early in the history of Newfoundland.

These fishing establishments were called "rooms,"<sup>19</sup> and it is quite usual in this country to speak of them as "Jersey rooms," no matter whether the proprietors belonged to Jersey or Guernsey. Harbour Grace is no doubt an Anglicization of Havre de Grace and was not named by the French, as they never resorted to Conception Bay either for fishing or for settlement, but it is a well-known fact that at a very early period two Jersey firms had fishing establishments there. The ground on which the Post Office stands and the land adjacent belonged to the Gushue family from time immemorial and was known as the "Jersey room." Gushue is a corruption of Guizot, the name of a well-known Jersey family. As a proof that the Gushues were originally Guizots they can show a piece of plate with the name Guizot on it, which has been handed down for generations. Near the waterside of this property was a large rock in which an iron ring-bolt was fastened, used in mooring ships, and on it were cut names and letters in old Jersey style. The De Quettevilles had an establishment on the south side of Harbour Grace, also known as the "Jersey room," very early in the sixteenth century. The house in this property was called the Stone House and was built of freestone quarried at an island in the bay. Only the foundations now remain. Peter Le Seour, who was a convert to Methodism by Coughlan and who afterwards introduced Methodism into Jersey in 1770, carried on a business at Harbour Grace.

Bay Roberts was originally Bay de Roberts; the Roberts were a Jersey family. A prominent hill in this place is still called Prelaux Hill, after two Jerseymen who lived there. Near the southeast point of Conception

<sup>19</sup> A fishing "room" consisted of owner's or agent's house; shop and store; warehouses for storing fish; cookroom (a building in which the shoremen, that is the laboring men working on shore at the curing and shipping of fish, lived); cooperage; forge; sail and net lofts; stages, or places in which the fish was landed, split, and placed in salt; flakes (erections on which the fish was spread to be dried after being in salt for a certain time); etc.

Bay lies the little fishing village of Bauline; there can be no doubt that the original name was Baleine, after a place in the island of Sark which it very much resembles. The names of many of the inhabitants of Conception Bay are reminiscent of the Channel Islands. Gushue (Guizot), Puddister (Poingdistre), Pasher (Perchard), Hookey (Le Huquet), Le Grow (Le Gros), Fillier (Filleul), Hawcoe (Hacquoil), Nichol (Nicolle), Piccott (Picot), Furey (Le Huray), Norman, Noël, Le Drew, Gosselin, Grouchey (Gruchy), Murrin (Mourant), Cernew (Quenault) are names peculiar to Jersey and Guernsey and prove the descent of these people, although many of them have no knowledge of where their forefathers came from. It cannot be argued that they are of French descent, as no French ever settled in Conception Bay or resorted there for fishing, and the people who bear these old Norman names have been settled there for generations.

On the south coast of Newfoundland there are many more Channel Island names among the inhabitants. St. Mary's Bay, Cape St. Mary's, St. Mary's Harbour, and Colinet are names peculiar to Jersey. The Nicolles of Jersey, early in the history of Newfoundland, had a fishing establishment at St. Mary's Harbour. St. Mary's was probably named by them after the parish of St. Mary's in Jersey, and the bay in which the harbor was situated and the cape at its western entrance took their names from that of the principal harbor.

At the eastern entrance to this bay there are two places now called St. Shotts and St. Shores which formerly were named St. Jacques and St. George. The French pronunciation of these two names is responsible for the corruption. These two points might have been named by the French, but it is not likely that they would have called a place after the patron saint of England, whereas the Channel Islanders would. In Placentia Bay, at Placentia, the old French capital, the Villeneuves of Jersey had a fishing establishment long before the French occupation, as previously noted in this article. From there they moved to Burin and established a business which was continued uninterruptedly by Jersey firms until a few years ago. Marquise, between Placentia and Argentia, is probably named from La Marquise in Guernsey. On the west side of Placentia Bay, we have Paradise from Paradis on the Guernsey coast, Petit Fort from the same source. Jersey Island lies outside of Rushoon and Bain Harbour. Croncy Island off Beau Bois is Gros Nez. In Burin, at the entrance to the cove where the Jersey premises are situated, lies an island known to past generations as Villeneuve Island after the Jersey family which removed from Placentia about 1680. Corbin Island and Harbour a few miles southwest of Burin bear a well-known Jersey and Guernsey name. At Little St. Lawrence the Jersey firm of De Grouchy, Nicholle & Co. had a thriving establishment. A drawing of the island on which the principal buildings were established appears in the diary of the Duke of Clarence (afterwards William IV), who visited this place in H. M. S. *Pegasus* in 1786. St. Law-



rence was probably named after the parish of St. Lawrence in Jersey. Lying off the eastern point of Fortune Bay is Jerseyman's Bank, and twenty-five miles inside the point is Fortune, evidently named by a Jerseyman after Fortunée in Jersey. Farther in the bay is Harbour Mille (pronounced Millay). In Jersey there is a place called Millais and several families of that name. There is a place called Corbin on the west side of the bay which is both a Guernsey and Jersey name. Blue Pignon is evidently Blanc Pignon, after the place of that name in Jersey. Miller's Passage is a name which is evidently a corruption, as no person of the name of Miller ever lived in the neighborhood or was known to have been there. Jersey Harbour was the nearest inhabited place in the early days, and it is probable that Mouilliérs, after the Jersey name, was the original designation. To show how names have been corrupted, that of a place near Miller's Passage is now known as Mose Ambrose; the original name was Mon Jambe. Jersey Harbour was named by Jerseymen. Pass Island was originally Passee Island, whether called after Passee in Guernsey or *passee*, meaning a channel, it is hard to determine; the old French charts give Passee, which does not mean a channel. In French *passee* means pass, channel; *passé*, beyond; *passée*, a passage of troops. The name of Pass Island was written Passee without any accent marks. We now come to Hermitage and Hermitage Bay. When this place was named there were no people in Newfoundland excepting the aboriginal Indians. There is only one way of accounting for the name, and that is that it was called so by a Jerseyman who saw in an island off Hermitage a resemblance to the Hermitage in Jersey off the port of St. Helier.

There can be no doubt that the people of the Channel Islands early settled along the south coast of Newfoundland, the family names of these people occurring frequently from St. John's to Cape Ray. Messervy, Clement, Payn, Tessier, Le Messurier, Grandy (Grandin), Lesbirel, Dumaresque, Le Feuvre, Hulon (Huelin), Ayre (Ahier), St. Croix, Cabot, De la Cour, Le Grand, Renouf, Berteau, Du Tot, Le Marquand, Le Drew, Bonnell, Knights, Hue, Lambert, Sacrey, Bisson, Beaucamp, Chevalier, Vautier, Le Moine, Le Fresne, Corbin, Le Roux, Carey, Le Scelleur, Sorsoliel, Frewing, Angot, Pinel, Ereant, La Fosse, Le Quesne, Falle, Le Riche, Vaudin, La Rassignoll, La Blanc, Tupper, Havilland (Du Havilland), Fashion (Fashion), Dobree, Thomey (Thoume), Ozanne, Tibbo (Thibault), and Siviour are among the names peculiar to Guernsey and Jersey which designate many of the inhabitants in the settlements of Placentia, Fortune, and Hermitage Bay and along the coast to Cape Ray. In Hermitage Bay is a place called Gaultois. The original name was an old Norman word, Galtas, which means "like a pinnacle or dormer"; the place itself has several pinnacles and is well named. There has been much controversy about the name Ramea given to a number of islands which lie southwest of Burgeo; it has been written in various ways, Ramie, Ramée, and Ramea.

Le Ramée is the name of a place in Guernsey, *rames* is an old Norman word for wild vetches, and vetches are to be found in all these islands. In all probability the name Rames was given to them because of the quantity of vetches found there. At Rencontre, east of the Ramea Islands, there are two hills, at the mouth of a small bay, which are called St. Aubin and St. Helier after two towns in Jersey.

On the western coast of Newfoundland, Bay St. George was probably named after the parish in Guernsey of that name, and the island of Guernsey at the entrance to Bay of Islands was named by a Guernsey Islander.

In the foregoing I have endeavored to show the intimate connection which the people of the Channel Islands have had with the early history of Newfoundland. So far as I know this subject has not been dealt with by historians; in fact, our local authorities Pedley,<sup>20</sup> Harvey<sup>21</sup> and Prowse<sup>22</sup> in their histories completely ignored the Jersey and Guernsey men, although in their time the remembrance of some of the old Jersey "rooms" was quite fresh, and some of the Jersey firms were then in existence. The De Quettevilles, Clements, Renoufs, Le Messuriers, Payns, Falles, Berteaus, De Grouchy, Nicolls, Villeneuves, all had at one time establishments, the places of which are as well known today as they were one hundred years ago.

Before concluding I wish to note that the Jersey people had an early connection also with the continent of America.<sup>23</sup> The state of New Jersey, in the United States, was a portion of that tract of country lying between the Connecticut River and the eastern side of Delaware Bay as well as all the islands between Cape Cod and the Hudson River, which Charles II had bestowed upon his brother James on the 12th of March, 1664. To this tract the name of Nova Caesarea,<sup>24</sup> or New Jersey, was given, in honor of Sir George Cartaret of Jersey, who governed the isle from 1643 to 1651 and there entertained Prince Charles during his exile from England. The Duke of York subsequently transferred to Lord Berkeley and Sir George Cartaret of Jersey all his new possessions.

Another curious fact, which marks the early connection that the Channel Islanders had with America and their knowledge of the intercourse with the Indians, is that while the French word for tobacco is *tabac*, the Channel Islanders called it *ptun*, the name of a very old Indian tribe of America which, until very lately, was supposed to be extinct. This word is still in use in the Channel Islands.

<sup>20</sup> Rev. Charles Pedley: *The History of Newfoundland from the Earliest Times to the Year 1860*. London, 1863.

<sup>21</sup> Joseph Hatton and Rev. M. Harvey: *Newfoundland, the Oldest British Colony: Its History, Its Present Condition, and Its Prospects for the Future*. London, 1883.

<sup>22</sup> Work cited in footnote 12.

<sup>23</sup> Article "New Jersey," *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 11th edit., 1910-11.

<sup>24</sup> Caesarea was the name given to the Island of Jersey by the Romans. Jersey is a corruption of Caesarea. See Falle's history (cited in footnote 1), p. 2.